



a fierce case study

# Presbyterian Senior Living Connects Geographically Dispersed Workforce One Conversation At A Time



## Background

Presbyterian Senior Living is an over 80-year-old not-for-profit, charitable organization, governed by a volunteer Board of Trustees. As a parent corporation, Presbyterian Senior Living works through a number of subsidiary organizations to form a network of communities and services to meet the diverse needs of seniors in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and southeastern Ohio.

## Challenges

Presbyterian Senior Living (PSL) employs compassionate people. One of the most important success attributes for people who provide senior services is emotional competence. Empathy is highly encouraged, yet expressing honest emotion while delivering a clear message and taking responsibility for how the message impacts others is no easy task.

“One reason we thought Fierce training would work for us is the tools help ensure emotions don’t impede clarity and productivity.” said Jim Bernardo, Chief Operating Officer at PSL. “We want to strengthen relationships—to gather input appropriately and identify areas we excel and areas we need to improve.”

“*[Fierce] tools help ensure emotions don’t impede clarity and productivity.*”

— JIM BERNARDO  
Senior Vice President  
Chief Operating Officer  
Presbyterian Senior Living

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PRESBYTERIAN  
SENIOR LIVING

## CHALLENGES

- Ensuring emotions strengthen rather than impede messages
- Reaching a diverse and geographically dispersed workforce (25 locations—4 regions)
- Absence of corporate trainers

## SOLUTIONS

- Committed to and endorsed training from top-down
- Partnered operations with human resources for facilitation
- Customized Fierce Conversations training with health care and organizational examples
- Split training into three shorter sessions with incorporated practice time

## WHAT IS CHANGING

- Improved financial results
- Less didactic, more inclusive meetings
- Stronger professional and personal relationships



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— JIM BERNARDO  
Senior Vice President  
Chief Operating Officer  
Presbyterian Senior Living

With 25 locations across four regions, another concern was how to provide tools for a geographically dispersed and diverse workforce. "We have very different people providing very different services to very different consumers," said Bernardo. "We want to empower all our respective staffs at each location. We want them to have a process framework for problem solving and give our folks the necessary skills to resolve issues and make plans at the local level, with their local constituents."

Without dedicated corporate trainers, leaders knew they would need to be creative—both in how to implement training and how to ensure it made a difference.

### **Solutions**

As keeper of the culture, the CEO at PSL, Steve Proctor, made a commitment to attend at least one of all initial Fierce Conversations training sessions for first and second-line managers. He also created a DVD for later classes he would not be able to attend in person. "Steve is an outstanding supporter," said MaryAnne Adamczyk, Senior Vice President of Corporate Relations at PSL. "Once he believes in something, there is no middle ground."

By starting with senior management, PSL built top-down commitment. Fierce training and tools began to permeate throughout all levels of the organization. "In ideal situations, people saw their leadership embracing new techniques—they saw a difference in their supervisors," said Brian Parks, Executive Director at St. Andrew's Village and Fierce Facilitator. "And they were more prepared to learn themselves. They knew they'd be supported."

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Because they do not employ dedicated corporate trainers, PSL decided to pair a facilitator from operations with an experienced human resources person. The choice brought credibility to the program and allowed facilitators to integrate real-life situations. “In the past, we’ve had training that contains a health care section, but it doesn’t always resonate,” said Adamczyk. “Fierce resonates with our staff because we make it real for them from the first day.”

PSL also tailored the length of the experience. Rather than conducting Fierce Conversations training as a two-day session, they decided to split the experience into three days with one month in between each training session. People were able to let instruction sink in, practice new habits and report back to the class.

### What Is Changing

One of the most exciting changes since Fierce training rolled out is the financial rewards of the team conversation model. Also known as beach-ball conversations, the team conversation model provides an inclusive approach to planning and conducting meetings and ensures all members participate and offer perspectives.

“One executive director of a center told us about a beach-ball conversation that saved over \$321,000 of revenue,” said Parks. “They weren’t capturing all the reimbursement they could because the team was not working well together,” added Adamczyk. “They now use the beach-ball conversation model to delve into problems.”



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MARYANNE ADAMCZYK –  
Senior Vice President  
Corporate Relations  
Presbyterian Senior Living

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Conversations are becoming more inclusive, less didactic. “Rather than looking for fresh perspectives, people would frequently head into meetings looking for confirmation of the decisions they’d already made,” explained Bernardo. “Fierce provides us with a structure to gather more ideas and possible solutions.”

Finally, Fierce is changing personal lives in addition to professional lives. “People tell me, until I get my life situated at home, I can’t focus on my professional life,” said Parks. “We’ve seen personal development plans for people facing cancer or going through a divorce. And they’re making a difference.”

The next phase of the Fierce roll-out is to ensure training sticks and permeates throughout all levels of the organization. PSL continues to partner with Fierce to ensure learning is sustained and new habits become the way people communicate with each other every day.

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— BRIAN PARKS  
Executive Director  
St. Andrew’s Village  
Fierce Facilitator

### add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit [fierceinc.com](http://fierceinc.com) or contact us at 206.787.1100.

